

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date	CABINET – WEDNESDAY 14 DECEMBER 2022
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM NO 10
Subject	PAN REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR THE OXFORD TO CAMBRIDGE AREA
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Andy Graham, Leader; Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider whether the Council should be a participant in the proposed pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area.
Annexes	Annex I – Letter from Cllr Barry Wood as Chair of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Leadership Group to the Secretary of State
Recommendations	<p>That Cabinet resolves to:</p> <p><i>(a) Recommend to Council that West Oxfordshire be a participant in the proposed pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area</i></p> <p><i>(b) Approve a contribution of £4,000 towards the pan-regional partnership.</i></p>
Corporate priorities	<p>Climate Action: Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.</p> <p>A Vibrant District Economy: Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy.</p>
Key Decision	Yes
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	Leader, Deputy Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal Services

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 A new pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge region is being proposed. This proposition has developed following discussions between local partners and government officials. The pan-regional partnership would bring together around twenty local partners including councils, local enterprise partnerships and the Arc Universities Group. The partnership would provide a vehicle to take forward shared economic and environmental ambitions.
- 1.2 The new pan-regional partnership would sit alongside other regional partnerships such as the Western Gateway, Midlands Engine and Thames Estuary. The Government is willing to help fund the new partnership, to supplement small contributions from local partners.

2 MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 Government policy supports regional partnerships which have a strong interest in collaboration. The basis for an Oxford to Cambridge pan-regional partnership is the shared interest in delivering sustainable economic growth with a higher quality natural environment.
- 2.2 The proposed new partnership would be an efficient and streamlined locally-led partnership of local government, universities and local enterprise partnerships.
- 2.3 The partnership would link with the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and with the other member Growth Boards across the region. It would involve partners in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire.
- 2.4 A new pan-regional partnership has the potential to provide a range of benefits locally. It can provide an additional vehicle to help deliver local priorities in the short and longer term. It would attract revenue funding support which can increase capability and the capacity to deliver value in areas of common interest. This would include capacity and capability to build future business cases and proposals for investment. It would also provide an open channel into government and help improve cross-departmental engagement within government.

Governance

- 2.5 A new Oxford to Cambridge Pan-regional Partnership Board is proposed to oversee the work and operations of the partnership and this would comprise of:
 - An Independent Chair as selected by the Board;
 - One Chair from each of the member Growth Boards or equivalent (including an additional Co-Chair from the Central Area Growth Board) – for Oxfordshire this would be the Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership
 - One Chair representing each of the Programme Sub-Groups (Economy and Environment)
 - One Chair each from the main constituent stakeholder groups: LEPs, Arc Universities Group, England's Economic Heartland
 - Independent Stakeholders as selected by the Board (non-Executive)
 - Senior Government representatives (non-Executive)
- 2.6 The Board's prime function will be to oversee the delivery of the partnership's work programme, as agreed by the membership. Detailed terms of reference will be developed for the Board which will clearly state that the Board will not seek to impose decisions onto partners, whilst ensuring there continues to be respect for the sovereignty of each partner's formal, statutory and legal status. Subsidiarity will be a key working principle for the new Board in how it carries out its functions. It is anticipated the Board will meet quarterly, with

an annual conference where the activity of the region will be promoted, and all partners will meet as a plenary to consider future work priorities and progress.

- 2.7 To support programme delivery, two further Sub-Groups will be established (Economy and Environment). These will be comprised of relevant stakeholders and local partner representatives. The Sub-Groups will select their Chair who will also represent the Sub-Group on the Board. The Board will oversee the Communications programme directly as this underpins all activity.
- 2.8 A local authority will act as the accountable body to underpin finance and resource management.

Operations

- 2.9 A Chief Executive/Lead Officer group comprising similar representation to the main Board will support the programme delivery and effective management of the partnership through transition, supported by a lead CEO and Director role.
- 2.10 The OCPRP and its programme will be supported and delivered by a small operational team as follows: Director to oversee day to day operations and be the lead officer advocate for the partnership supporting the Board and the Chair; three programme leads for the thematic programme areas; lead for Communications; and an administrator. The nature and scope of the roles will be agreed through the Chief Executives Working Group. Operations will be supported (HR, finance, legal) by a Host Authority acting as the Accountable Body.
- 2.11 It is proposed to have senior responsible officers (SROs) for each of the major work programmes (Economy, Environment, Communications). This will ensure there is local ownership and commitment to the programme and will assist with the match-funding element which Government requires.
- 2.12 The SROs will work closely with their relevant Chair of the Programme Sub-Group as well as be the lead officer representative for the programme supported by a senior programme lead officer from the operational team.

Work Programme

- 2.13 An outline work programme has been developed and this reflects the level of budget available for 2022/23. A programme for 2023/24 would be developed and agreed by the Board in consultation with the whole partnership for presentation to Government for agreement in Spring 2023.
- 2.14 The outline work programme sets out three major programme areas; Economy, Environment and Communications. The programme includes an investment prospectus and atlas, environmental initiatives, and identity and brand development.
- 2.15 In April 2021 Cabinet endorsed the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles. These have also been endorsed by a significant number of other stakeholders across the Arc. The establishment of the pan-regional partnership will provide a mechanism to take forward these principles and collaborate on action.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Government has agreed a first tranche of interim capacity funding support of £250,000 for the current financial year. The planned 2022.23 budget for the partnership does include a small local contribution this year from local partners of £4,000, and this will help unlock a second tranche of Government funding (£250,000).
- 3.2 There will also be local contributions of in-kind officer time on project oversight and delivery.

4 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no significant legal implications from involvement in the pan-regional partnership. The new partnership will not have the ability to impose its decisions on the Council and local sovereignty will be respected.

5 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 If the partnership fails to work effectively there could be a small reputational risk for the Council.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 6.1. No negative effect on different service users, customers or staff is expected from the implementation of the recommendations in this report.

6 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The new pan-regional partnership provides a useful forum for the Council to pursue its environmental and climate ambitions.

7 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8.1 A decision could be made not to be a participant in the pan-regional partnership. The Council would therefore not be able to influence the work programme of the partnership.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.2 The following documents are of relevance to this report:

- Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, Reported to Cabinet April 2021 as part of the item on the Oxfordshire Growth Board Environment Advisory Group.